



Ἀρχίλοχος Arkhilokhos

ARCHÍLOCHUS

OF PAROS

Archílochus probably lived about 680–640 B.C. A rather short life is suggested by the tradition of his death in battle. Archílochus was the son of a Parian aristocrat and a slave woman. He made his living as a mercenary soldier and took part in the colonization of Thasos, off the Thracian coast, where he fought against the Barbarians of Thrace. The story goes that he was engaged to Neoboúle, the daughter of Lykámbe, but the engagement was broken and Archílochus made the family miserable with his invective. According to one version, the daughters of Lykámbe hanged themselves for chagrin. While this is unlikely, the general account probably contains much truth, since the names of Neoboúle, Lykámbe, and other friends and enemies of the poet appear in his work. It is hard to see how Archílochus could have earned any profitable patronage by the poems he wrote; and he thus stands as one of the earliest known examples, for Western tradition, of the amateur poet, driven by love and compulsion to record his hates, loves, friendships, and amusements. He also wrote beast-fables, apparently of the sort later assembled under the name of Aesop.

The first ten items here given may well be very short complete poems rather than fragments.

EPIGRAMS

• 1 •

I am two things: a fighter who follows the Master of Battles,
and one who understands the gift of the Muses' love.

• 2 •

By spear is kneaded the bread I eat, by spear my Ismaric
wine is won, which I drink, leaning upon my spear.

. 3 .

Some barbarian is waving my shield, since I was obliged to
leave that perfectly good piece of equipment behind
under a bush. But I got away, so what does it matter?
Let the shield go; I can buy another one equally good.

4 . *On a Willing Woman*

Wild fig tree of the rocks, so often feeder of ravens,
Loves-them-all, the seducible, the stranger's delight.

5 . *Epitaph*

O vast earth, you contain Arístophon and Megatímōs
under your folds, the two tall columns of Naxos sustained.

6 . *Charon the Smith*

Nothing to me the life of Gyges and his glut
of gold. I neither envy nor admire him, as
I watch his life and what he does. I want no pride
of tyranny; it lies far off from where I look.

7 . *Two Captains*

I don't like the towering captain with the spraddly length of leg,
one who swaggers in his lovelocks and cleanshaves beneath the chin.
Give me a man short and squarely set upon his legs, a man
full of heart, not to be shaken from the place he plants his feet.

POEMS

8 . *On Friends Lost at Sea*

Blaming the bitterness of this sorrow, Perikles, no man
in all our city can take pleasure in festivities:
Such were the men the surf of the roaring sea washed under,
all of us go with hearts aching against our ribs
for misery. Yet against such grief that is past recovery
the gods, dear friend, have given us strong endurance to be

our medicine. Such sorrows are variable. They beat now
against ourselves, and we take the hurt of the bleeding sore.
Tomorrow it will be others who grieve, not we. From now on
act like a man, and put away these feminine tears.

. 9 .

Heart, my heart, so battered with misfortune far beyond your strength,
up, and face the men who hate us. Bare your chest to the assault
of the enemy, and fight them off. Stand fast among the beamlike spears.
Give no ground; and if you beat them, do not brag in open show,
nor, if they beat you, run home and lie down on your bed and cry.
Keep some measure in the joy you take in luck, and the degree
you give way to sorrow. All our life is up-and-down like this.

10 . *Eclipse of the Sun*

Nothing will surprise me any more, nor be too wonderful
for belief, now that the lord upon Olympus, father Zeus,
dimmed the daylight and made darkness come upon us in the noon
and the sunshine. So limp terror has descended on mankind.
After this, men can believe in anything. They can expect
anything. Be not astonished any more, although you see
beasts of the dry land exchange with dolphins, and assume their place
in the watery pastures of the sea, and beasts who loved the hills
find the ocean's crashing waters sweeter than the bulk of land.

FRAGMENTS

. 11 .

I will make nothing better by crying, I will make nothing
worse by giving myself what entertainment I can.

. 12 .

Often along the streaming hair of the gray salt water
they pray for sweet homecoming won in spite of the sea.

. 13 .

Glaukos, a soldier of fortune's your friend as long as he's fighting.

14 . *Thasos*

Here the island stands
stiff with wild timber like a donkey's bristling back.
This is no place of beauty, not desirable
nor lovely like the plains where the River Siris runs.

. 15 .

Glaukos, look! The open sea is churning to a wash of waves
deep within. A cloud stands upright over the Gyrean cape,
signal of a storm, and terror rises from the unforeseen.

. 16 .

Luxurious in a spray of myrtle, she wore too
the glory of the rose upon her, and her hair
was all a darkness on her shoulders and her back.

. 17 .

The fox knows many tricks, the hedgehog only one.
One good one.

. 18 .

Say goodbye to Paros, and the figs, and the seafaring life.

19 . *Thasos*

All the griefs of all the Hellenes came together in this place.

20 . *Thasos*

Let not the stone of Tantalos
overhang this island any longer.

. 21 .

We, a thousand, are the murderers of the seven men who fell
dead. We overtook them with our running feet. . . .

22 . *On Drowned Bodies*

Hide we away these painful gifts of the lord Poseidon.

23 • *The Wreckers and a Former Friend*

...
 slammed by the surf on the beach
 naked at Salmydéssos, where the screw-haired men
 of Thrace, taking him in
 will entertain him (he will have much to undergo,
 chewing on slavery's bread)
 stiffened with cold, and loops of seaweed from the slime
 tangling his body about,
 teeth chattering as he lies in abject helplessness
 flat on his face like a dog
 beside the beach-break where the waves come shattering in.
 And let me be there to watch;
 for he did me wrong and set his heel on our good faith,
 he who had once been my friend.

• 24 •

Here I lie mournful with desire,
 feeble in bitterness of the pain gods inflicted upon me,
 stuck through the bones with love.

• 25 •

If it only were my fortune just to touch Neoboule's hand.

• 26 •

Such is the passion for love that has twisted its way beneath
 my heartstrings
 and closed deep mist across my eyes
 stealing the soft heart from inside my body. . . .

• 27 •

My lord Apollo, single out the guilty ones;
 destroy them, O destroyer god.

28 . *The Fox Appeals for Justice*

O Zeus, our father Zeus, for you control the sky,
you oversee the works of men,
the right acts and the wrong they do; so yours to judge
the crimes and punishment of beasts.

. 29 .

Father Lykámbes, whatever were you thinking of?
And who seduced the common sense
in which you once were so secure? How things are changed!
Your neighbors giggle in your face.

. 30 .

To the gods all things are easy. Many times from circumstance
of disaster they set upright those who have been sprawled at length
on the ground, but often again when men stand planted on firm feet,
these same gods will knock them on their backs, and then the
evils come,
so that a man wanders homeless, destitute, at his wit's end.

. 31 .

Érxias, where is all this useless army gathering to go?

. 32 .

No man is respected, no man spoken of, when he is dead
by his townsmen. All of us, when still alive, will cultivate
the live man, and thus the dead will always have the worst of it.

. 33 .

One main thing I understand,
to come back with deadly evil at the man who does me wrong.